

How long you will be gone and when you are coming home matters in terms of recruiting and retention. Sixty-eight percent of the Army Reserve's goal is being met in recruiting. The Guard and Active Forces are suffering in recruiting because this war has taken a toll. The more attractive the benefit package is, the more we can appreciate the service, the more likely we are to get the good people and recruit patriotic Americans.

What this legislation is designed to do is fill in that gap and solve the problem that faces the Guard and Reserve families, and that is lack of health care. Every Reserve component chief says that when they talk to the troops, the one thing that means the most to them, on top of every other request, is continuity of health care. So we are proposing a benefit for the Guard and Reserve that they will have to pay for, but we will allow, for the first time, Guard and Reserve members to sign up for TRICARE, the military health care system, like their Active-Duty counterparts have, with one major difference: they will have to pay a premium, unless they are called to active duty, similar to what we pay as Federal employees.

I believe that is a fair compromise. It will allow uninsured guardsmen and reservists to have health care at an affordable price. It will allow people who have uneven health care in the private sector to get constant health care. We will have a system where people, when they are called to active duty, will have the same set of doctors and hospitals that service the family as when they are in the Guard and Reserve status. We think it desperately will help recruiting and retention and readiness, and it will make people ready for the fight.

We have worked on the costs. We are looking at cutting the cost of the program in half by requiring a slightly higher premium from the force and offering TRICARE standard versus TRICARE prime. I believe it fiscally makes sense but still achieves the goal of the original legislation of providing continuity of health care.

The reason we are not offering the amendment on the supplemental is that because of the cost saving we have achieved in redesigning the program, there is no cost to be incurred in 2005. We are working in a bipartisan manner with the chairman of the Armed Services Committee to go ahead and offer a full-time military health care benefit to guardsmen and reservists that they can sign up for, to give them continuity of care at a fair premium. It is a good deal for all concerned. The reason we are doing this is obvious: We are utilizing the Guard and Reserve in a historic fashion. If we don't change the benefit structure, we are going to drive the men and women away from wanting to serve. After a while, it gets to be too onerous. I hope we will be able to produce a product in committee in the authorization bill that will allow this

program to be offered to the entire force.

Here is what we did last year. I will end on this note. The body reached a compromise last year. Last year, we came up with a program that for every person in the Guard and Reserve who was mobilized for 90 days or more, from September 11, 2001, forward to today, for every 90 days they served on active duty, they would get a year of TRICARE for themselves and their families. That program goes into effect April 26 of this year, a few days from now. I have the brochure called TRICARE Reserve Select. About a third of the force would be eligible. It will cover the Selective Reserve, drilling reservists. That is one change we made.

I am still in the Reserves, but I am in an inactive status. I do my duty over at Bolling Air Force Base. I am not subject to deployment, so I will not be included. The bill we are designing covers people subject to being deployed and being sent to the site. The compromise of last year will allow a year of TRICARE for every 90 days you are being called to active duty.

There are thousands of reservists who will be eligible for this program, and this brochure called TRICARE Reserve Select will be available to your unit, and you need to inquire as to whether you and your family would be eligible to join TRICARE because of your 90-day-plus deployment. The goal this year is to build upon what we did last year by offering the program to the entire drilling force.

The other two-thirds of the Select Reserves who are subject to being deployed, who drill and prepare for combat-related duties so that when they get called, if they do, they will be ready to go to the fight, it will be a benefit for their families that I think most Americans would be glad to provide.

So we have a program in place for those who have been called to active duty for 90 days or more since September 11, 2001. It goes into effect in a week. It will make you and your family eligible for TRICARE a year for every 90 days you serve. So if you serve a year in Iraq, you get 4 years. The goal this year is expanded to total drilling Selected Reserve force. We cut the program in half by increasing the benefit payment required of the Guard and Reserve member and reshaping the benefit package. I think it is more affordable than ever, but the cost of having 10 percent of the force unable to go to the fight is financially and militarily very large. The cost of lack of continuity of health care for Guard and Reserve families is emotionally devastating.

With about two-tenths of 1 percent of the military budget, we can fix this problem and reward Americans who are doing a great job for their country. The likelihood of the Guard and Reserve being involved in a deep and serious way in the war on terror is probably unlimited.

The last fact I will leave with you is this: We talked to the Reserve commander yesterday about the utilization of the Air Reserves. Fifty percent of the people flying airplanes in terms of transport into the theater of operation and servicing the theater of operation with a C-130 are Reserve or Guard crews. I have been to Iraq 3 times now, and I have flown about 16 or 17 flights on a C-130 from Kuwait into Iraq and Afghanistan. Every crew except one has been a Reserve or Guard crew.

There is a rule in the military that a Guard or Reserve member cannot be deployed involuntarily for more than 24 months. That rule has served the force well because it takes stress off the force, it keeps people gainfully employed because if you are gone all the time, it is hard to keep a civilian job. So we put a cap of 24 months of involuntary service into the theater of operations, into the war zone.

What astonished me was that two-thirds of the pilots and the aircrews in the Guard and Reserve have already reached that mark. Two-thirds of those who serve in the Guard and Reserve have already met their 2-year involuntary commitment.

One fact that keeps this war afloat is that they are volunteering to go back. Legally we cannot make them go back, but they are volunteering to keep flying. And God bless them because two-thirds of 50 percent statutorily do not have to go to this fight. They choose to go to this fight. This benefit package is a recognition of that commitment.

I am very optimistic—to all those Guard and Reserve families who may be listening today—that help is on the way, that this body is going to rise to the occasion, and we are going to improve your health care benefits because you earned it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

AMENDMENT NO. 430

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, in every year since 1951, Congress has included a provision in the General Government Appropriations Act which states the following:

No part of any appropriation contained in this or in any other act shall be used for publicity or propaganda purposes within the United States not heretofore authorized by Congress.

I am quoting from section 624 of Public Law 108-447.

This is the law of the land, and yet despite the law, the Congress and the American people continue to hear about propaganda efforts by executive branch agencies. On more than one occasion, this administration has provided tax dollars to well-known conservative talk show hosts to promote its agenda. One was paid a hefty fee to promote the No Child Left Behind Act. Another talk show host was paid to promote the administration's welfare and family policies.

If those examples are not bad enough, in an effort to blur the line between